

Tamarisks



With only four genera, the small family **Tamaricaceae** comprises a group of plants called **tamarisks**. The family is not native to North America. Thriving in Eurasia and Africa, the shrubby to tree-like plants tolerate saline and alkaline conditions in dry habitats, giving rise to their common name, **salt cedars**. Invasive to the southwestern United States, these drought-resistant plants--introduced in the 1800s for ornamental, shade, and other purposes--are ideally suited to survive and prosper in the desert environment, and subsequently outcompete and replace native plants, making them a nuisance to local land managers. Only a few species are present in the Mojave.

Family **TAMARICACEAE** (Tamarisks)

Salt Cedar Tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*)



catkin-like clusters

CCWP; Las Vegas, NV



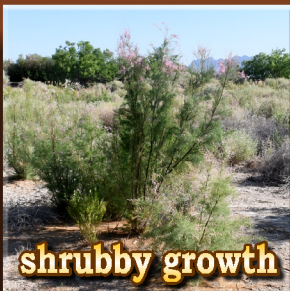
March

Clark County Wetlands Park; Las Vegas; NV



scaly leaves

CCWP; Las Vegas, NV



shrubby growth

HBVP; Henderson; NV



erect, red stems

HBVP; Henderson; NV

- Flowers:** perfect; terminal raceme inflorescence; 5 petals and stamens; **pink**; .2"
- Stems:** erect, spreading; numerous; highly branched; glabrous, slender, flexible; **red brown**; ~144" +
- Leaves:** triangular to ovate; scale-like; entire; alternate; saliferous, scarious (dry, papery); **green**; .1"
- Blooms:** April to August
- Range:** native to Eurasia; invasive cosmopolitan
- Habitat:** moist, alkaline; silty to sandy; riparian areas (wetlands, oases, etc.); Lower Sonoran Life Zone

Notes:

common; deciduous perennial; invasive outside its native range, grows as shrubs to small trees to 25' (usually much less) throughout riparian areas of w US (especially in desert areas) and elsewhere at elevations up to 5,000' (usually lower); .16", ovoid, **capsular** fruit bearing many tufted seeds; hybridizes with other tamarisk species, making identification difficult; bark used to make tea to treat diarrhea; used for windbreaks, ornamental purposes, etc.

Mojave presence: invasive; introduced

Comments:

Though its flowers are attractive, salt cedar--named for its ability to tolerate salty habitats by collecting salt in its leaves (similar to saltbushes)--is a major invasive species in riparian areas of the desert southwestern US. Thus, it is actively targeted for removal by various government agencies to protect native plant species. It is common to see this plant in wetlands areas, such as the specimens shown here growing at the [Clark County Wetlands Park](#) and [Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve](#), both in southern Nevada.

Family TAMARICACEAE (Tamarisks)

Athel Tamarisk (*Tamarix aphylla*)



spikes of flowers

Furnace Crk; DVNP; CA



September

Furnace Creek; Death Valley NP; CA



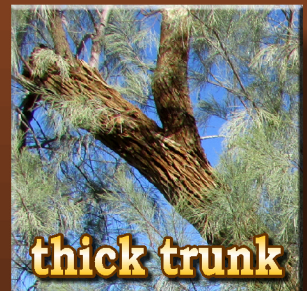
dense branchlets

Furnace Crk; DVNP; CA



ideal for shade

Furnace Crk; DVNP; CA



thick trunk

Furnace Crk; DVNP; CA

- Flowers:** oblong; 3.5" raceme inflorescence; 5 petals and sepals; white, pink, red; .12"
- Stems:** wood trunk; singular; highly branched; slender, green, pendent branchlets; red brown; to 10"
- Leaves:** scaly; entire; alternate; sessile; saliferous (salty); green; .12"
- Blooms:** July to November
- Range:** northern Africa, Middle East; introduced to southwestern US
- Habitat:** arid, saline/alkaline; desert flats, salt pans, washes, roadsides, etc.; Lower Sonoran Life Zone

Notes:

uncommon; evergreen, perennial shrub/tree; grows to 75' in arid habitats of the sw US (CA, NV, AZ, UT) and elsewhere at elevations below 3,000'; lanceolate capsule fruit bearing many seeds with long tuft of hairs on tip; **Athel Tree**, **Athel Pine** (not related to true pines); largest of all tamarisks; planted as a windbreak and shade tree; provides nectar for numerous insects especially bees

Mojave presence: non-native; introduced

Comments:

It is easy to understand why these large-growing plants were chosen as shade trees, such as the ones shown here at Furnace Creek Ranch in **Death Valley National Park** in September, 2017. Though non-native, having been introduced from northern Africa, they are not considered **invasive** because they generally do not reproduce in the wild (most seeds are sterile). This actually makes them ideal for the intended purpose!

Ta3